



***WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday,
February 4, 2009, for the purpose of meeting with the management of Empirian Village.***

Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:05 p.m. in the MultiPurpose Room of Springhill Lake Elementary School.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Celia Craze, Director of Planning and Community Development; Jim Sterling, Assistant Community Development Director; Willie Davis, Supervisory Inspector; Joe McNeal, Assistant Director of Recreation; MPO Jonathan Lowndes, Community Policing Officer; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Sharon Thames, Sandy Christian, Don Allen and Michael Arrington, Empirian Village; Brian Madison, County Councilmember Ingrid Turner's Office; Kap Kapastin, Beltway Plaza; Brian Gibbons, Advisory Planning Board Member; Clem Wilkerson, Willie Stewart and Che Sayles, Greenbelt West Residents Association; Jim Giese, News Review; Jordan Attebury, Gazette; Walter Moody and others.

Mayor Davis welcomed everyone to the meeting. She noted the meeting was a stakeholder meeting with the representatives of Empirian Village.

Short Term Plans for Empirian Village

Ms. Thames explained that Empirian Village is focused on improving services for their residents. She said they are currently working on the following short term plans.

- *Improving response time to 24 hours for non-major repairs*
- *Reducing the number of code violations*
- *Installing a help desk at the corporate office*
- *Hiring a resident counselor to assist residents who are experiencing financial difficulties*
- *Improving physical assets such as HVAC systems*
- *Addressing rodent issues*
- *Continuing with Verizon upgrades*

Mayor Davis and Mr. Putens mentioned the lack of communication between Empirian Village and the residents regarding the Verizon work and noted some residents were surprised when Verizon personnel entered their residences without notice. Ms. Christian said residents were notified 48 hours in advance of the work, but many residents did not cooperate.

Mr. Roberts mentioned the placement of air handling units on balconies and the removal of glass enclosures at the front entrances. Ms. Thames said air handling units had been installed on only

28 units in the first phase as a test before moving onto the second phase and the glass enclosures had been removed and replaced with dormers in a few units, also as a test. Mr. Sterling advised City permits had been put on hold until a meeting between the City and Empirian Village is held to address these issues.

Mr. Allen said the residents' storage facilities in each building were in violation of fire code and had recently been removed.

Mr. Herling mentioned the lack of recycling areas available for residents. Ms. Thames said she would take this issue under advisement.

Mayor Davis said Mr. Stewart had identified many lighting issues and asked if these were being addressed. Mr. Allen said he had been working with Mr. Stewart and hoped to have all the lights working within 30 days.

Ms. Mach mentioned AIMCO informed all new residents of the safety issues with windows in the units and provided window guards for residents who requested them. Ms. Thames said Empirian Village was not currently doing this but she would take the issue under advisement. Mayor Davis and Mr. Putens mentioned the incidents of children falling from the windows and emphasized the need for this issue to be addressed promptly. Mr. Arrington assured Council that any steps they could take to improve the safety of residents would be done.

Long Term Plans

Ms. Thames said one long term plan was to relocate all of the laundry facilities to a centralized location which would also include Wi-Fi and a gym. The location being considered is the old training facility for Giant.

Ms. Thames also said the long term plans include upgrading the quality of the apartments but the exact details have not yet been finalized. She indicated they would have more detailed plans in a few months. Mayor Davis requested that the detailed plans be presented to the City and residents groups. Mr. Putens asked for a list of items being considered. Ms. Thames said she would take this request back to the corporate office for response.

Police Officer Partnership and Officers as Agent Agreement: Mayor Davis said Council was pleased Empirian Village signed the partnership agreement. Ms. Thames commented she thinks the partnership works very well and complimented the work of MPO Lowndes, MPO Rich and all the officers assigned to their area.

Other Matters

Community Newsletter: Ms. Thames said the resident newsletter was published in both English and Spanish. Mr. Putens asked if a portion of the newsletter was available for residents to use. Ms. Thames said no, but she would take this idea under advisement. Mayor Davis requested copies of the newsletter be sent to Council.

Mayor Davis asked if the News Review was being distributed in Empirian Village. The majority of residents in attendance indicated they regularly receive the News Review.

Ms. Mach asked if Empirian Village had a website. Ms. Thames said the property management company had a website and Ms. Christian was looking into creating a blog for residents. Ms. Mach suggested a link to the City site be included to let residents know about City services.

Plans for Greenbelt Station: Mayor Davis said plans for Greenbelt Station were on hold at this time.

Involvement with Springhill Lake Elementary School and Greenbelt Middle School: Mayor Davis explained the Backpack to Health Initiative occurring at Springhill Lake Elementary School and asked Empirian Village to consider becoming a partner in the program. She also asked that information on the program be included in their community newsletter.

Mr. Putens encouraged Empirian Village to become involved with Greenbelt Middle School and suggested they contact Ms. Pope for information.

Mr. Arrington said Empirian Village is committed to being involved in the Greenbelt community, but asked Council and the residents of Greenbelt West to have patience. He said Empirian Village is working hard to improve the property and provide fundamental basic services to the residents but it will take some time before they get fully up to speed. Mayor Davis said patience will come as long as Empirian Village continues to communicate to both their residents and the City.

Comments from Residents

Mr. Stewart reported several concerns he had with Empirian Village: maintenance workers opening doors of apartments without knocking; residents being charged an additional \$300 to \$500 increase in their monthly rent if they don't choose to renew their lease; and management not soliciting ideas from residents when considering renovations.

Ms. Spencer said her daughter had recently moved into a unit in Empirian Village and was experiencing problems with rodent infestation. She said calls to Empirian Village had not been returned even though the City had issued code violations for the property. Ms. Thames said Mr. Allen would speak with her after the meeting. Mr. Putens asked how long property owners had to correct code violations. Mr. Sterling explained the process.

Mr. Sayles thanked Council for arranging the meeting this evening and said the residents of Greenbelt West looked forward to working together as part of the Greenbelt community.

Mayor Davis encouraged all residents to become involved in the community and mentioned volunteers were always needed for City Advisory Boards and Committees.

Mayor Davis mentioned the representatives from both Empirian Village and the City would be available after the meeting concluded to meet with individuals if they had further questions.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*